

Just Another Brother in a Motorhome.....

By Warren Brown



Bias is the child of ignorance. Take the matter of motorhomes. I'd always hated them. I had my reasons:

- Motorhomes are big, which means they take up lots of highway.

- They are slow. A good Hyundai economy car can outrun the fastest of them.

- Their bigness and slowness makes them rolling nightmares, at least for drivers unlucky enough to be stuck behind them on a mountain-road or lane-restricted highway.

But those were surface justifications for my prejudice. I grew up in Louisiana, where the only people who lived in motorhomes were poor whites, or so it seemed. Surely, I'd never seen any of my people in trailer camps, perhaps because I never looked. Every black adult with authority, my parents included, warned me to "stay away from those places."

So, it was with some trepidation that I accepted an assignment to discover America in a motorhome over the summer. Outwardly, I bragged about my great good luck. "What a job!" I proclaimed. Inwardly, I trembled with uncertainty, partly because I didn't know the first thing about driving or operating a motorhome; but mostly because of racial fears stoked

by family members and some well-meaning black colleagues.

Said one black friend: "Are you sure YOU want to do THIS. Not too many of us in those places, you know."

Turns out that my motorhome instructor was a brother, Ed Hicks, a retired Navy man who

handles training for the Reston, VA-based Recreational Vehicle Industry Association. Hicks, who has all of the mannerisms and directness of General Colin Powell, made everything look easy. I learned.

On my last lesson, Hicks tried to teach me something else: "You will be among the few blacks in those camps," he said. "But I wouldn't worry about it. I've been RVing since 1976. I've never had any problems. If the rest of America behaved like the people behave in most of those camps, we'd all be a lot better off."

Experience proved Hicks right. Even at the Bryn Mawr Ocean Resort in St. Augustine, FL., where some campers preferred flying Confederate flags on the Fourth of July, my wife and I had a good time.

(One of the recalcitrant "rebels" apologized for displaying the Stars and Bars, saying: "I don't mean to be offensive. It's a regional thing with us, nothing political or racial. It's just like your Redskins flag in Washington." Words that make you go, "Hmmmmm.")

We did meet other African Americans on the road. One of them saved our butts at the Outdoor Resorts of Virginia Beach.

I was trying to back our test vehicle, a 1996 Pace-Arrow motorhome, into a parking spot in pitch-black darkness. I was

doing poorly.

"Whoa!," shouted Aaron Cameron, a black fellow who owns a hair salon in St. Louis. "Stop! Stop, now! You're about to back off the pad!" Cameron came running from his motorhome, an elegantly outfitted Champion, to help guide us onto the docking pad.

"Your first time?," he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

Cameron, a self-described conservative, laughed. "Man, welcome," he said.

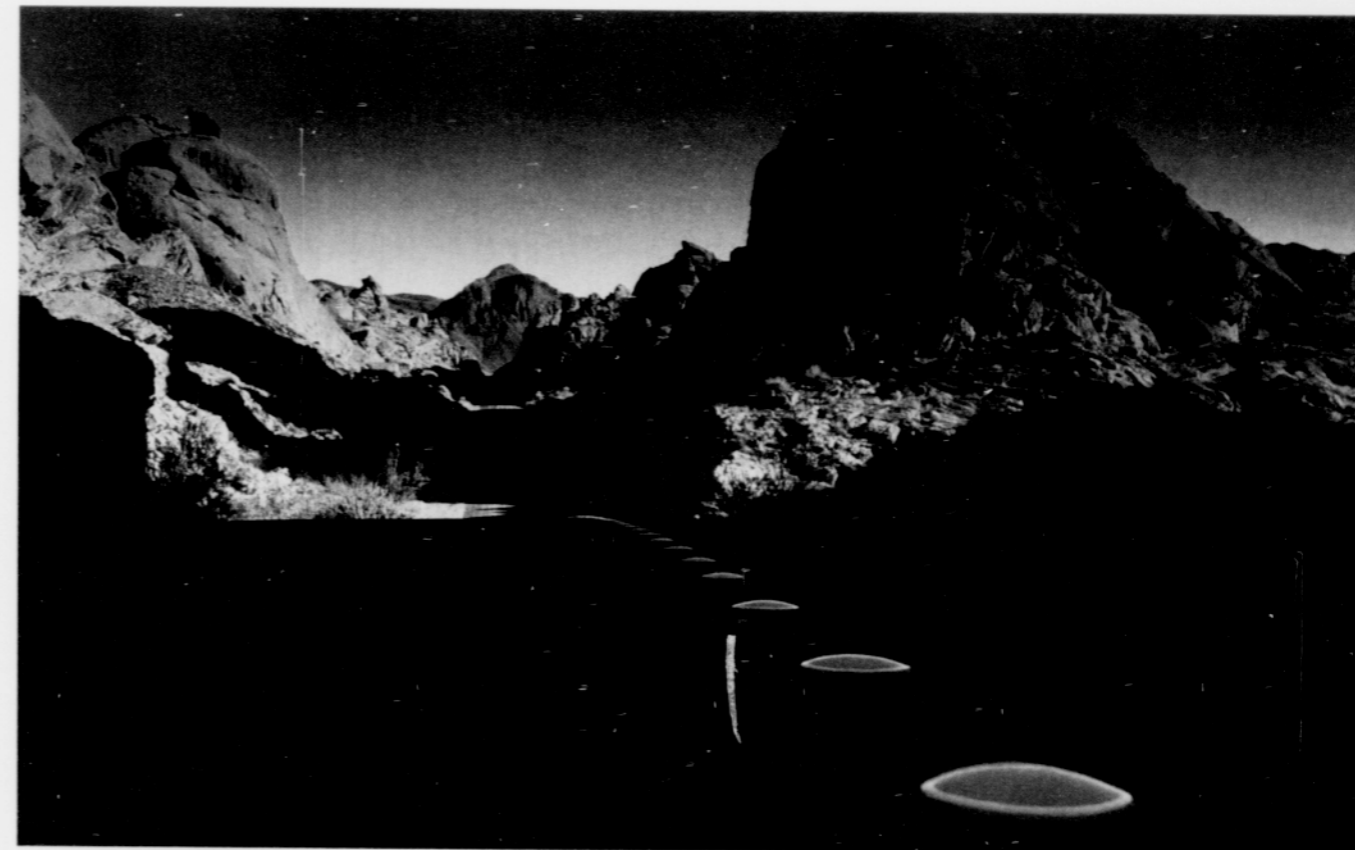
"It's good to see some more of our people out here camping."

Cameron and his wife, Doris, a school counselor, came here with friends, Beverly Dailey and her husband, Clarence Dailey, Jr. Beverly Dailey is an operator for AT&T. Her husband is a conductor on the Union Pacific Railway. The Daileys were driving a new Winnebago.

In a subsequent conversation, I asked Aaron Cameron how he knew I was black, inasmuch as I was pulling into the resort in the dark and trying to dock at a site a couple of hundred yards from his trailer.

"I didn't know what you were," Cameron said. "All I knew is that you were about to lose it with that trailer. The only way I knew how to stop you was to yell at you as loud as I could. That's the way things work in these camps. We try to help one another. I hope you didn't mind."

The next morning, we awakened to the sounds of birds and rippling water. And there, in the dawn, I saw what Aaron Cameron saved us from—a lagoon a couple of yards behind our concrete parking pad. Had we continued our erroneous backing maneuver, our motorhome would have turned into a sinking houseboat.



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